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ABSTRACT

Community colleges must recognize the differences in the perceptions of the college environment by high school counselors, community college counselors, and community college students when planning high school visits and disseminating information. The instrument used to test the extent of the differences was the College and University Environment Scale. Subjects (counselors from all but one high school in the area, all college counselors involved in high school visits, and 55 community college students) were from a small metropolitan area in southern Michigan. While a wide discrepancy was found between high school and community college counselors, no significant differences were found between the perceptions of college students and college counselors. (CA)

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A COMPARISON OF PERCEPTION OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT BY HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS, COMMUNITY COLLEGE COUNSELORS, AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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In the past decade the community college has become an important factor in the educational plans of many high school graduates and other persons seeking further education or training. More and more people are attending the community college, attracted by its comprehensive appeal and wide diversity of programs (Solomon, 1968). Reynolds (1962) has identified six educational needs of students:

1. Preparatory education
2. Vocational education
3. General education
4. Instruction
5. Guidance
6. Increased availability of appropriate educational opportunities.

He also points out that thousands of students are faced with what may seem like insurmountable barriers to additional schooling. Some of these barriers may be financial or in the form of inappropriate educational programs for their goals. It would appear that perhaps the community college is in a position to bridge the gap for many students undecided about post high school education. However, the decision is a difficult one for many students because they lack sufficient information about themselves and available programs to meet their vocational or educational needs. It would seem to follow that a student faced with making a decision about further education would need a great deal of help in making a wise selection of an institution. Standing and Parker (1964) have stated that, "...while little is known about what constitutes an inappropriate selection of an institution, it would seem logical to hope

that prospective students are provided with as accurate information as possible from admissions officers, school counselors, and others who influence students choice."

Evidence has shown that High School counselors are significant persons in helping students with the college decision (Kerr, 1962; Hoyt, 1968; Graff and Peters, 1969). In addition the counselor was seen as the most important source of educational and vocational information and materials. It would seem obvious that a particular college has an obligation to provide the best possible information to the counselors to aid them in their task.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether there are differences in the perceptions of a community college environment between the high school counselors, the college counselors (who are responsible for orientation and articulation with the High Schools), and a sample of freshman and sophomore students on the college campus. Other studies have shown that there are differences in the perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators (Greer, 1966; Wilson and Dollar, 1970). Seymour (1968) also found that high school counselors and students differed in their perceptions of University environments. The present study was undertaken to find out to what extent, if any, the subjects differ in the way they "see" the community college environment. If differences do occur then it is imperative that the college recognize this when planning high school visits and disseminating information about the college. They must recognize their responsibility to the high schools in providing accurate and up-to-date information about all aspects of the college program. Hoyt (1968) has indicated there are two chief reasons

for wanting to describe a colleges' salient characteristics:

> "...(1) these characteristics are presumably related to the special needs and capacities of students, on the one hand, and the special facilities and opportunities of the institution on the other. A thorough description should permit a reasoned statement of an institutions goals and the construction of useful hypotheses and theories concerning how it might best promote student growth and development. (2) Institutional description is a necessity in guidance. Guidance workers seek to help students make college plans that will maximize opportunities to develop their potentials within the limits set by reality considerations. It is apparent that present methods of communicating college characteristics are inadequate."

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were drawn from the service area of a community college located in a small metropolitan area in Southern Lower Michigan. The enrollment consists of approximately 2,000 full-time students, the majority coming from perhaps 12 high schools in the area. Counselors from all but one of the High Schools were included in the study. All members of the counseling staff at the college were included. All the college counselors are involved in high school visitations. A random sample of 55 full-time students was drawn from both the freshman and sophomore classes. Because of a limitation on time and the problems in collecting data from commuter students it was necessary to limit the size of the student sample to a total of 55.

The Instrument

The instrument used for this study was the College and University Environment Scale (CUES) (Pace, 1963, revised 1969). The CUES inventories the subjects perceptions of the college environment. It consists of 100 statements about college life-feature and facilities of the campus, rules and regulations, faculty, curricula, instructions and examinations,

student life, extra-curricular organizations, and other aspects of the institutional environment which help to define the atmosphere or intellectual-social-cultural climate of the college as the subjects see it.

The CUES yields five scales to describe the environment of the college:

1. Practicality. A practical instrumental emphasis in the environment. Procedures, personal status, and practical benefits are important.

2. Scholarship. Emphasis is on competitively high academic achievement and serious interest in scholarship.

3. Community. A friendly, cohesive, group-oriented campus. Feelings of group welfare and loyalty.

4. Awareness. A concern and emphasis upon three sorts of meaning: personal, poetic, and political. An emphasis upon self-understanding and reflectiveness.

5. Propriety. An environment that is polite and considerate. Caution and thoughtfulness are evident. Group standards of decorum are important.

Data Analysis

The general null hypothesis was that there are no significant differences between the perceptions of the community college environment and the above mentioned groups. Means and standard deviations were computed for each group on the five scales of the CUES. The t-test was used to test significant differences between group means and the .05 level of confidence was required to reject each null. All possible between group comparisons were made on each scale.

RESULTS

Table I shows the means and standard deviations for each CUES scale for each of the three groups to be compared. In ranking the group means for each scale, it can be noted that there is wide dispersion among the groups. Some commonality is found on the Scholarship scale where students

and college counselors ranked this scale 1st while the high school counselors rank it 3rd. Also, the Practicality scale is ranked 5th by students and high school counselors, and 4th by the college counselors.

Insert Table I about here.

The *t*-ratios for comparisons of the three groups are presented in Table II.[2] Significant differences were found between the college counselors and the high school counselors on the Scholarship scale and the Awareness scale. A significant difference was found between the high school counselors and the students on the Awareness scale. No other scales yielded significant differences between any of the compared groups.

Insert Table II about here.

DISCUSSION

Results of this study lend support to the notion of the individuality of college environments. While Wilson(1970) found Practicality, Awareness, and Scholarship to be ranked highest by his subjects, the present study found Practicality to be ranked last by two groups and 4th by the other group. Also, while Awareness was ranked high by two of the groups it was ranked last by the other group.

These findings would also tend to disagree with Wilson's contention that there is a dominant press for practicality in American higher education. At least on this particular campus the environment would suggest that it is not important to be doing the right thing, doing what is expected, and knowing the right people in order to succeed.

It is interesting to note that while the students and college counselors viewed the environment as being one with a serious interest in scholarship, and an emphasis on competitively high academic achievement, the high school counselors did not perceive the environment this way. This finding may

have some implications for the articulation between the college and the high school counselors. The college may want to ask if these perceptions are really accurate and what effect does this have on the type of information the high school counselors present to prospective students? Also, the college may want to ask if this[15] the kind of image they want to project?

The other significant difference that was found was on the Awareness scale. Here the high school counselors perceptions differed significantly from both the students and the college counselors. Apparently the high school counselors see the environment as a place where there is a tolerance for non-conformity and personal expressiveness; where there is a stress on awareness of self, of society, and of aesthetic stimuli. However, the students and college counselors perceptions were significantly different from the high school counselors. An interesting aspect of this finding is the wide discrepancy between the high school counselors and the college counselors. The high school counselors ranked Awareness 1st while the college counselors ranked it last.

It would appear from the findings of this study that there does exist some differences in the perceptions of the community college environment between high school counselors, college students, and college counselors. The findings would suggest that the greatest differences exist between the high school counselors and the college counselors. Interestingly enough there were no significant differences between the perceptions of the college students and the college counselors.

One limitation that was evident in this study was some apparent weaknesses in the instrument. Since the CUES was developed primarily for 4-year colleges and Universities many of the items were inappropriate for the community college. A new version of the CUES is being developed for use with Junior-Community colleges. Replication of this study may be beneficial using the new scale when it is available.

Table I

Means and Standard Deviations of the College Students, College Counselors, and High School Counselors on the Five CUES Scales

		SCALE									
		PRACTICALITY		SCHOLARSHIP		COMMUNITY		AWARENESS		PROPRIETY	
Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
College students	55	7.45	1.63	10.51	2.47	8.95	1.75	9.15	2.77	8.98	1.9
College counselors	8	8.38	1.92	11.38	2.07	9.75	1.67	8.00	1.41	10.38	2.6
H. S. counselors	15	7.93	1.49	9.13	3.09	8.47	1.60	10.53	2.20	9.27	2.3

Table II

t-Ratios for Student, College Counselors, and H.S. Counselors Comparisons

	t-Ratios for Indicated Scale				
Group	PRACTICALITY	SCHOLARSHIP	COMMUNITY	AWARENESS	PROPRIETY
H.S. Counselors Students	-1.08	1.60	1.01	-2.03*	-0.44
College Counselors H.S. Counselors	0.58	2.08*	1.78	-3.35*	1.01
College Counselors Students	-1.30	-1.08	-1.26	1.85	-1.45

*p < .05

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